

**Testimony before the
Michigan State House of Representatives
Families and Children Services Committee
Regarding HB 5439, Amending MCLA 400.57b(3)
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I am the Executive Director of United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan, a disability advocacy group which works to promote the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities. I am here to speak against the proposal in House Bill 5439 which would require the Department of Human Services to count all Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits as income to the family when considering family independence assistance. The proposed language states:

In determining a member's income for eligibility for family independence assistance, the department shall include the amount any member of a program group receives in SSI under Title XVI as part of that program group's income.

We are particularly concerned about the effect of this provision on families in which it is the child who receives the SSI. First, such a provision would assume that the SSI received for the child is available to the entire family's needs. In fact, by law, it's not. When a parent receives SSI benefits on behalf of a child, the parent is legally obligated to use the benefits only for the needs of that child. Paying for clothing, transportation, food, or other items for other family members would be an unlawful misuse of the funds and could result in the parent being forced to repay the SSI benefits to the Social Security Administration.

Second, taking SSI of a child into account as income discounts the very real fact that SSI is used in part if not entirely to pay for extra costs of a child with a disability. SSI is needed to pay for the higher expenses of persons with disabilities, such as accessible transportation costs, and frequent transportation costs for frequent medical appointments, assistive devices not covered by Medicaid, payment for aides with skills to assist with the care of a child, adding a ramp to a house, special clothing and shoes, an intercom system to listen in at night – the list goes on and on.

Third, the reason some of these families have a low enough income to qualify for SSI in the first place is that the parent can't work because of the child's disability. I cannot tell you how many parents with whom I have spoken who have been unable to work because their child is frequently sick and must stay home; because skilled accessible child care is hard to find, or because the child has too many medical and/or therapy appointments for an employer to accommodate.

Fourth, SSI for a child is already reduced by the federal government to reflect the income of a family – a process called deeming. It would be ironic if the process were to happen both ways.



Finally, SSI for a child has always been hard to get, and since 1997 when the federal government tightened its eligibility guidelines, it has been even harder. Only children with very significant disabilities are even eligible, and it is those children who need the extra income the most.

We urge you not to consider all SSI income when considering eligibility for family independence assistance.

Thank you.

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